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Strategies for Successful Client Interactions

An Interview with **Lee Gallagher** of InfoPrint Solutions

How do you go about getting the initial meeting with a client?

Most people are doing three jobs at once and have little time for you. No one is going to read more than three bullet points. Whether direct mail, email or voice mail, you have to boil it down to something very simple and valuable to get their attention, and finally an appointment. You need to have a strategy and conduct your own campaign just to get in the door with customers. For example, get to know the admins—they can really help you score an appointment. They love flowers!

How do you go about developing a rapport with a potential client?

Try to recognize right away what type of person you are talking to and how their personality fits with yours, so you can quickly figure out what questions to ask. You really have to look at who you're calling on. For instance, people higher up are going to be focused on business benefits, whereas people below them might be more focused on the technology. If I'm going in and know it's going to be a first-line manager, I know that's going to be a more technical meeting. Remember you have to start somewhere, so get yourself started.

What are your strategies for getting a client to take the next step?

You have such a short window to build confidence and loyalty in conversation with a potential customer. You have to know how to get the conversation going right away, getting through and quickly getting the person interested in your value proposition. I follow the 80/20 rule and let them do 80 percent of the talking. I listen to their business issues and ask them questions about how they approach solving their problems. In the field, I hear some very similar stories as well as very different situations. I always I always give my customer 100 percent of my attention.

One good strategy that I use is to really understand the business problem and not to prematurely offer a solution. Everyone tries to offer a solution—but every customer is different. I try to get a second meeting within five days to discuss a targeted solution. This allows me to interact with the customer over those five days and begin building a relationship. Remember giving a solution on the first call will allow your customer to immediately shop you with your competitors. Your job on the first call is to provide value and sell consultatively, and to get another meeting.

The second meeting with a client is what I like to call the 'head-nodder meeting'—you want them nodding 'yes'. Give the facts you know about the company, re-verify the business problem to solve, and then give them your solutions. You should validate the key points at the beginning, then talk about how to make the bridge over to the solution or to the next step.

What makes an effective sales presentation?

Don't just start talking! Say, 'Tell me about your business'. When you make your presentation a one-sided conversation, saying 'here's my whole bag of tricks,' the customer is just sitting there wondering what the difference between you and the competition. Presentations should be interactive, simple and conceptual, leading with a sentence that explains

BIO

Lee Gallagher started out in sales with IBM in 1992. During the time Lee worked for IBM, he was one of the top sales representatives, at one point blowing his quota by over 1000%, and he has won every sales award that the IBM Corporation offered. Lee currently works in a marketing role at a joint venture between IBM and Ricoh (InfoPrint Solutions Company) where he is challenged by bridging the gap between sales and marketing functions.



everything. A potential customer should be able to pull your presentation and give it to anyone in their management chain.

Also, it's important pay attention to nonverbal clues to help guide meetings with clients. Watch who's sitting next to who, who has their arms crossed, who's leaning in and who's leaning away.

Lastly, prepare your team. I never leave anything to chance. I have a pre-meeting with anyone going into a meeting with me to make sure they are prepared. It's funny but some of the most basic things that seem like common sense are what people often don't do: dress appropriately, be on time, don't chew gum, don't click your pen, listen actively, nod your head, take notes. Oh, and please, if you are taking a plane, bring your meeting clothes on board. Your customers do not want to see you in shorts as you explain that the air carrier lost your baggage.

What do you do when an interaction with a potential client isn't going well?

The key is really to anticipate ahead of time what objections clients might have, and have a strategy for how to handle these objections so you can sell over them. Make 'expected objections to sell over' part of your preparation for any presentation.

When a customer raises objections, try not to go into a defensive mode, but rather push back—take their argument and start breaking it down. For instance if a customer says, 'So what's the difference between you and the competition?' I'll switch it around and say, 'Tell me what value you perceive that you're getting from the competition.'

Of course there are always going to be situations where you can't recover, but don't let it affect your confidence. Brush off, and take note of how you can prepare better next time.

What advice would you give people starting off in sales?

People think that sales is easy and it's not. It takes a lot of industry research, Googling of your customers to get an understanding of their current publications, etc., and a lot of reading. You have to constantly educate yourself on your customers. Know what's going on in the industry you are selling to, and get an understanding of industry pain points and how you can drive value to those customers. You also have to stay educated on your competition. Out-strategize

your competition. Know what your competition is going to do and what you are going to do to counter it.

There are very good salespeople and there are people who are just happy to make their numbers. If you're passionate about it, you can be successful.

As I always say, the difficult is easy, but the impossible takes me three days!

Interviewed by Hayley Servatius and Jessalyn Clark of the CMO Council